

Northeastern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council

Thursday, Sept. 20, 2012

Held at Battle Mountain District Office, Battle Mountain, Nevada

RAC Attendance

Jeff White, Chairman	(1) Energy/Minerals
Jacob Carter	(1) Federal Grazing
Tom Connolly	(1) Federal Grazing
Kevin Lee	(1) Transportation
Jack Prier	(2) Environmental
Larry Hyslop	(2) Wildlife
Cyd McMullen	(2) Archeology
Bruce Holmgren	(3) State Agency
William Wolf	(3) Public-At-Large
Laurie Carson	(3) Elected Official
Julie Hughes	(2) Dispersed Recreation
Jeanne Nations	(2) Wild Horse & Burro
Vince Garcia	(3) Native American
Tony Carone	(1) Energy/Minerals

Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Representatives Present:

Ken Miller	District Manager – Elko, Designated Federal Official
Karen Weiss	Associate District Manager – Battle Mountain
Rosemary Thomas	District Manager – Ely
Tim Shannon	Egan Field Manager – Ely
Shawna Richardson	WH&B Specialist – Battle Mountain
Lesli Ellis-Wouters	Public Affairs Representative – Elko District
Bonnie Myers	Management Assistant – Battle Mountain

Members of the Public Present:

Laura Leigh
John Benson

0900 – RAC Members arrive at the Shoshone OHV Trail for field discussion of recreation management. Ethan Arky discussed the planning process for the OHV Trail and future plans for trail extensions.

Rosey Thomas spoke of the Silver State Trail and funds provided from SNPLMA for implementing a trail in Ely District. A feasibility study was done and environmental assessment completed; however the plan was appealed by the White Pine county commission and the Public Land Use Advisory Council. The plan was then dropped.

Bill Wolf commented that there was a lack of attention to the plan until time came for implementation and people need to get involved from the beginning.

Jack Prier asked about the use of ‘Rhinos,’ or side-by-side OHVs, and there was some discussion on this topic.

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Jake Carter stated the PLUAC supported the Silver State Trail, but there were numerous concerns with the Ely District trail, such as road issues, safety concerns, and emergency response. Local people didn't see the need for the trail.

Jeff White commented that the RAC could be instrumental in ensuring these types of issues don't happen again.

Ken Miller stated that recreation management was going to be a bigger issue and that BLM needs to work together with various partners to prepare for future recreation demands. Recreation is going to continue to grow as people from bigger cities venture to Northeast Nevada for outdoor recreation.

Jeff White agreed with a partnership approach to recreation opportunities. He also expressed the need for collaboration and communication.

Discussion ended at 1015 for travel back to Battle Mountain District Office.

11:05 Jeff White, Chair, reconvened the meeting in Battle Mountain District Office.

A request was received from the audience to postpone the meeting's Public Comment period until after RAC discussion of agenda items. A short discussion followed. The RAC determined public comment will commence as previously published.

Public Comment period opened at 11:08.

Comments by Laura Leigh - the drought management environmental assessment on Battle Mountain District provided them the ability to react very quickly. No other district had the same reactions to the drought. She went on to ask the RAC to recommend studies to encompass all uses of areas and how it affects adjacent areas. She reiterated her concern that her comments would be more pertinent if scheduled for after the RAC discussion. A handout she provided for distribution is on file at the Elko District Office.

Meeting Minutes from July 19 & 20, 2012 were reviewed and approved.

A discussion followed concerning RAC visits to the Ely area. Rosey Thomas mentioned the advantages to having Bi-RAC meetings. Consensus among the RAC members was to consider the possibility of a doing a Bi-RAC meeting in 2013 at the annual Tri-RAC meeting.

A question was raised regarding management of OHV projects; overall management vs. managing locally. Members of the RAC from the BLM explained the advantages of having a mixed approach to OHV. Another question was posed; is limiting heavy OHV use to one area the best approach scientifically?

11:30 Public Comment period closed and the meeting was adjourned for the lunch break. During the lunch break Ken Miller was recognized for his contributions to the RAC and he was wished well in retirement.

12:48 Jeff White reconvened the meeting.

WHB Discussion

Emergency gathers to protect the horses, livestock, land, etc. from the effects of the drought. The amount of forage available is higher in higher elevations this year. Horses were gathered in the Pancake area on an emergency gather. They are in Palomino holding area and in good condition.

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FY 13 gather schedule is a concern due to the lack of responses to solicitation for long term holding area contracts. Another concern is the drought affecting all of the Western states.

Q: Is the BLM responsible for hauling water to WHB and what is the difference between hauling water and feeding the horses? A: The BLM is responsible for maintaining healthy, viable horses. Horses may stay near a water source, even when it has failed, when there is feed nearby. An area's RMP can address when and if hauling water is appropriate.

Q: What about wells in the area that are available, but not used? A. BLM doesn't own the rights to the water. The WHB Act doesn't provide for long term solutions that take away from the naturalness of the horses.

Q: Bait contracts for horse gathers appear to give contracts free reign to get as many horses as possible. A. These are long term contracts intended to be used to maintain the horses in a healthy state and are written to allow BLM to adjust the number gathered to the need to gather.

Jeff White, Chair, asked Laura Leigh, a member of the meeting audience, if she was recording the meeting with videography and voice recording. She responded in the affirmative. Mr. White then asked if she would be using the recordings commercially. Ms. Leigh assured him the use would be non-commercial in nature.

Further discussion followed regarding Water/Bait Gathers; Public observations, horses left in the HMA vs. gathered, lifting restrictions for horse adoptions, cost effectiveness of bait traps vs. helicopter.

Karen Weiss, Associated District Manager, Battle Mountain, introduced Shawna Richardson, WHB Specialist. Ms. Richardson presented a slide show on the Diamond Complex (on file at Elko District Office). A short question and answer session followed.

Owyhee Complex, Ken Miller: the AML for the area is 620 to 999. Currently approximately 2250 wild horses are present. Nov. 1, 2012, a helicopter gather is scheduled. Much of the HMA was destroyed in wildfire. Horses are outside of their HMAs, but appear healthy.

2:30 Public Comment period reopened after discussion among RAC members to allow for additional time.

Laura Leigh again shared her comments; it's important to be ready for drought, need to be site specific, understand that all resources and actions are tied together in the ecosystem, and finally, consider supplemental feeding due to the crisis.

John Benson, member of the public, commented on the area near Cherry Creek where water hauling has occurred is in disarray.

2:37 Extended Public Comment period closed.

Review of Action Items/RAC recommendations

The letter with recommendations from the RAC to Amy Lueders, State Director, was received in her office and has been forwarded to Washington, DC. Suggestion to resend the letter with return receipt with an expression of the RAC's concern about this being the second time sent.

Action Item: Establish a state wide RAC WHB subcommittee. Bill Wolf moved to send a Letter of Recommendation to the BLM NSO and copies to the other Nevada BLM districts. Cyd McMullen seconded and the assembly passed the motion with a voice vote. Jeanne Nations and Cyd McMullen were nominated to the committee.

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The group discussed the merits of moving Public Comment period to the end of the RAC meetings. Public comment is intended to provide comments to the RAC and not discussion items to be considered during meetings. It was agreed that the comment period would be scheduled within the day dependent on logistics and other scheduling. Also, requesting the Tri-RAC meeting agenda to include 'drought', possibly using a multi-agency/private approach.

The '*Drought Management Handbook*' is available on line and via email from Lesli Ellis-Wouters (lellis@blm.gov).

Seed banks were discussed. A new seed bank facility is underway in Ely.

The Eco-Sanctuary proposal was discussed. A subcommittee was formed to draft a recommendation letter. Jake Carter, Jeanne Nations, & Larry Hysop were nominated for the committee. Members of the RAC can forward their comments to Lesli (lellis@blm.gov) by 10/15/2012. The subcommittee will have the letter prepared by November 5th.

Several RAC members' terms are close to renewing. Vetting has been completed and nominations should be approved and letters of appointment signed next week.

Meeting adjourned 3:58.